

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Plant Inspection Stations

Americans have grown accustomed to seeing a large and healthy selection of plants when they go to their local nursery to purchase a leafy Ficus tree or an exotic plant. However, most people are not aware of the long journey the plant has taken from Central America or some other foreign home and the careful measures the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has taken to ensure the plant is free of pests and diseases.

Each year, APHIS officers inspect a huge volume of plants that are mailed, carried, and shipped into this country by brokers, travelers, and nursery owners. In Fiscal Year (FY) 1999 alone, over 700 million plants were imported. Some of these plants carry foreign pests and diseases to the United States that threaten U.S. agricultural and natural resources. The Asian longhorned beetle (ALB), the Mediterranean fruit fly, and citrus canker are just a few of the harmful pests and diseases accidentally introduced into this country in the past decade.

To monitor plants, cuttings, and seeds entering the country, and to inspect the admissible ones for possible pests and diseases, APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program has established 15 plant inspection stations at ports of entry throughout the country. At these plant inspection stations, PPQ inspectors work with specialists in the fields of entomology, botany, and plant pathology to locate, examine, and identify exotic pests, diseases, and noxious weeds.

Frances Krim Memorial Inspection Station

USDA-APHIS-PPQ
2500 Brunswick Avenue (Building G)
Linden, NJ 07036
Phone: (908) 862-2012
Fax: (908) 862-2095

Inspections in FY 99:

Plants	4.2 million
Seeds	33 tons
CITES plant parts	1100 tons

Products treated for invasive pests:

Plants	\$164,000
Seeds	2 tons

The Frances Krim Memorial Inspection Station, which opened its doors in October 1998, has a wide array of technologies, including digital imaging used in pest identification. This system is linked to the USDA's Agricultural Research Service and the Smithsonian Institute for rapid pest identifications.

Importing Plants and Seeds

To import foreign plants and seeds, an importer must apply for an agricultural import permit from the PPQ Permit Unit and secure a phytosanitary certificate from the exporting country. Phytosanitary certificates verify that plant quarantine officials from the exporting country have examined the plants for pests and diseases prior to exporting them. The certificates also identify the plants by their scientific names and confirm that the shipment meets U.S. regulations for importation.

U.S. importers should secure agricultural permits for shipments far in advance of their transport. Import permits may be obtained from:

USDA-APHIS-PPQ
Permit Unit
4700 River Road, Unit 136
Riverdale, MD 20737-1236
Toll free: (877) 770-5990

When a shipment arrives at a PPQ plant inspection station, PPQ inspectors collect phytosanitary certificates from the importers. Typically, inspectors examine samples taken from each variety of plant and seed being imported. The inspection process includes a meticulous examination of the leaves,

stems, roots, and seeds of the plant. With the exception of only a few specified types, plants must not be rooted in growing media, such as soil, because insects, diseases, and noxious weeds could be hidden there. Inspectors also ensure that the plants are a manageable size for the inspection process.

Pests, Diseases, and Weeds

When PPQ inspectors discover a pest, disease, or noxious weed, they ensure that an accurate identification is made as soon as possible. PPQ inspectors refer all such interceptions to the appropriate identifiers who examine them and determine the extent of harm they could cause. If an identifier determines that an organism is actionable, meaning it is a known plant pest and does not exist in the United States or it exists in limited distribution, the plants undergo a quarantine treatment, are reexported, or destroyed. After the required fumigation treatment, the inspector releases the plants to the importer and allows them to enter the country. Should an identifier determine that the organism is not harmful and poses no economic threat to U.S. agriculture, the inspector releases the plants to the importer.

CITES Enforcement

All 15 PPQ plant inspection stations have been approved by the Department of the Interior to inspect any plants or plant products, such as exotic orchids or cacti, that are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). CITES is a comprehensive treaty signed by more than 150 countries, including the United States. This international agreement regulates the commercial trade of endangered species and monitors the trade of species that are at risk of becoming endangered. Since the treaty's ratification in 1974, CITES representatives have worked tirelessly to protect the world's plant and animal resources.

At PPQ's plant inspection stations, every shipment containing CITES-listed plants is inspected to ensure that it matches the description in the accompanying CITES documents. If the importers do not have the proper CITES documentation, PPQ inspectors will seize the plants and offer them back to their country of origin at that country's expense or place the plants in one of the many designated rescue centers in this country. There they are grown for research, breeding, or educational purposes.

Mailing Plants

Importers may mail plants and plant products directly to a PPQ plant inspection station. PPQ strongly recommends the following procedures for mailing plants:

1. Pack the plants in sturdy boxes or crates.
2. Indicate what is inside the package, as well as its origin, by clearly marking the outside of the package.
3. Use APHIS' green-and-yellow mailing label, issued with the PPQ permit, to ensure proper handling of the package.
4. Enclose a note with your name, mailing address, and permit number, so that inspectors can forward the package to you after inspection.
5. Enclose the proper postage fee for forwarding the plants to your address.

Help Safeguard American Agriculture from Pests and Diseases

Whether mailing a boxwood home from England, carrying propagated orchids back from Thailand, or shipping a load of philodendrons from Central America, importers must follow USDA's proper procedures for importing plants and plant products. By following these procedures, importers will help safeguard American agriculture from foreign plant pests and diseases.

For more information on APHIS' plant inspection stations, please visit the APHIS web site at www.usda.aphis.gov.

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